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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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SIPDIS
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TAGS: OPRC KMDR IS

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

President Obama's Mideast Remarks in Turkey

Key stories in the media:

The media reported and commented on President Obama's remarks in Ankara: Orly Azolai and other Yediot commentators as well as Maya Bengal of Maariv and colleagues and analysts from other media, opine that Obama sent a clear message from Ankara to FM Avigdor Lieberman: QThe U.S. strongly supports the goal of two states,Q Obama was

quoted as saying. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe highlighted what it says was Obama's call on Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians in order to form a front vis-`-vis Iran. Professor Avraham Ben-Zvi commented in Israel Hayom that this might herald the beginning of a more soured American-Israeli relationship in order to facilitate improved relations between the United States and the Muslim world. The Jerusalem Post quoted Environmental Protection Minister (Likud), Gilad Erdan, as saying: QIsrael does not take orders from Obama.

HaQaretz reported that an American official told the newspaper over the weekend that Obama does not oppose the inclusion of Hamas in a Palestinian unity government as long as Hamas agrees to the criteria and preconditions set by the Quartet. According to HaQaretz, the Americans also ask that Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad return to head the next Palestinian government and be responsible for the PA's finances. A Palestinian source told HaQaretz yesterday that in the coming days PA President Mahmoud Abbas is likely to ask Fayyad to form a new government, without the participation of Hamas.

HaQaretz and Israeli TV reported on a possible June visit to Israel and the PA by President Obama. HaQaretz and Israel Radio also reported that U.S. special envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell will arrive in Israel on Monday.

Palestinian sources were quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that PA President Mahmoud Abbas refuses to meet with PM Benjamin Netanyahu until Israel freezes all settlement construction and recognizes all agreements it is a signatory of, and the two-state solution.

The Jerusalem Post reported that senior defense officials have told the newspaper that Israel fears that Hamas is working to build unprecedently large tunnels along the Philadelphia Corridor that will be used to smuggle long-range rockets into Gaza in one piece.

Leading media reported that last night Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called Netanyahu to congratulate him over the formation of his government and invite him to a meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh.

Leading media reported that, ten months after the bulldozer terror attack in Jerusalem in which three Israelis were killed, police and army forces are now demolishing the apartment of the attacker in Sur Bahar, East Jerusalem. Israel Radio reported that a Palestinian who attempted to run over members of the security forces at the spot slightly wounded three policemen and was shot and killed by a border policeman.

Leading media reported that EU special envoy Marc Otte, unfazed by the policy review currently under way in the new Netanyahu government and comments by Lieberman against the Ann Arbor process, recommended patience, saying the new government had been in power less than a week.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced yesterday that the Pentagon plans to end production of the F-22 Raptor, a top-of-the-line stealth aircraft that Israel has long coveted. At the same time, Gates said he would nearly double the allocation to \$11.2 billion for the F-35 Lightning II, another stealth plane that Israel would like to acquire, as part of a budget plan he will be taking to President Obama. Obama is expected to review the budget and submit his own version for Congressional approval in early May. Gates' announcement, part of what he termed a holistic strategic shift in the Defense Department's priorities, decreases the likelihood that Israel would ever be able to obtain the F-22, foreign sales of which are currently banned by Congress. Some Israeli defense officials are hoping that the end of U.S. orders for the plane will provide enough pressure that Congress -- which doesn't want to lose the thousands of jobs that the airplane's production provides -- will reverse the ban on foreign exports. However, The Jerusalem Post quoted Andrew Krepinevich of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments as saying that while Lockheed Martin would be sure to make that argument, he would expect that with the US ending its program, the jet manufacturer would start to shut down production.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Danny Zamir, the head of the Rabin Pre-Military Academy in Kiryat Tivon, told the daily yesterday that Operation Cast Lead was completely justified, that isolated acts of vandalism do not make the IDF an army of war criminals, and that

religious graduates of the military preparatory programs add to the morality of the IDF. The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that IDF reservists have asked Attorney-General Menachem Mazuz to launch a criminal investigation against HaQaretz for publishing "testimonies" by soldiers of alleged misconduct and serious human rights violations during Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip earlier this year. The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli and Palestinian human rights groups as saying yesterday that they had collected evidence that Israeli troops attacked Palestinian medical workers and delayed the evacuation of wounded people during the recent offensive in Gaza. The Jerusalem Post reported that Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish, a physician, three of whose daughters were accidentally killed by the IDF during the operation, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Israel Radio reported that this morning Israel successfully tested an improved version of the Arrow anti-missile system.

Mako.co.il, a Web site associated with Channel 2-TV, reported that a new play in Gaza casts Jews as drinking Muslim blood.

Israel Radio reported that this morning the Knesset voted to allow the government to present a two-year budget. The Jerusalem Post and others quoted opponents as saying that the plan constitutes a Qpower grab.

All media devoted considerable space to the earthquake in central Italy, where an Israeli-Arab medical student is missing.

President Obama's Mideast Remarks in Turkey:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QIntense American involvement in solving the conflict ... will compel the Israeli government, the Palestinians and the Syrians to decide if they share Obama's vision or if they prefer to take the road of confrontation with the United States.

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in Ha'aretz: QThe Democratic President did not only publicly adopt the documents entirely associated with the Bush administration, he promised to breathe life into them during his tenure at the White House.

Washington correspondent Orly Azolai and others wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QObama was ... obliged to cite Annapolis because of the storm that Foreign Minister Lieberman stirred up with his statements.

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: Q[President Obama believes that] the government change in Israel does not free it of its Bush-era commitment in the Annapolis declaration and Roadmap.

Diplomatic correspondent Maya Bengal and others wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QThe great question that diplomatic sources asked was whether Israel and the United States will enter a confrontational track given the gaps regarding the road leading to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Visiting Professor of Political Science at Haifa University Avraham Ben-Zvi, an expert in U.S.-Israeli relations, wrote in the independent Israel Hayom: QOne cannot fail to ask whether the explicit mention of the Annapolis understandings heralds the beginning of a negative approach to Israel.

Block Quotes:

II. "A Clear Message from Obama"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (4/7): QThe clear, unequivocal American message delivered from Turkey, the first Muslim state [that President Obama] visited, was aimed at all Arab and Islamic countries no less than Israel. The message was one of conciliation, understanding, appreciation and a sincere desire for cooperation, not just with America's friends in the region but also with Iran, whom Obama invited Qto take its rightful place in the community of nationsQ.... This is a change that Israel must internalize, and it could not have come at a better time, just after the formation of Benjamin Netanyahu's new government. On the podium in Ankara, Obama, who committed to protect Israel's security, made clear his views on this security when he declared: QThe United States strongly supports the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and securityQ.... These messages now await implementation. Intense American involvement in solving the conflict, based on principles already enunciated, will compel the Israeli government, the Palestinians and the Syrians to decide if they share Obama's vision or if they prefer to take the road of confrontation with the United States.

II. "Obama Signals to Lieberman"

Washington correspondent Orly Azolai and others wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (4/7): QUntil now, President Obama and his special envoy, George Mitchell, have refrained from citing the Annapolis conference, which symbolized the legacy of President Bush and his Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, and instead focused on the two-state vision. Obama was now obliged to cite Annapolis because of the storm that Foreign Minister Lieberman stirred up with his statements. Indeed, Obama's statements were perceived around the world as the American response to Lieberman's inaugural speech. Foreign Minister Lieberman personally refused to respond to President Obama's statement. But, in closed conversations he said that he was unwilling to accept the Annapolis process and was only prepared to recognize the Roadmap. He said that while he had been opposed to the Roadmap, once the agreement was accepted by Israel he was bound to uphold it. People in Lieberman's circle also said: QObama underscored that that the two-state vision was agreed to both in the Roadmap and at Annapolis, but that doesn't mean that he's in favor of Annapolis as a route or a course. We have no problem with the two-state objective.

III. "Breathing Life into BushQs Vision"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in Ha'aretz (4/7): QThe Democratic President did not only publicly adopt the documents entirely associated with the Bush administration, he promised to breathe life into them during his tenure at the White House. We can assume Obama knows that Bush promised to fulfill the vision of two states for two peoples while he was president. Perhaps this is why Obama announced that what Bush considered a vision, he considers a realistic goal. While Bush blended the Arab peace initiative into the road map, to throw Saudi Arabia a bone, Obama is making it one of the pillars of his Middle East policy.

IV. "Speeches Make It Clear: Palestine First"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (4/7): QObama conveyed four messages to Netanyahu in his address in the Turkish parliament: Don't waste my time trying to revoke the Qtwo-state solutionQ and replace it with a new vision that would not include an independent Palestinian state beside Israel.... The government change in Israel does not free it of its Bush-era commitment in the Annapolis declaration and Roadmap -- a Palestinian state with territorial contiguity in the West Bank, freezing settlements and evacuating outposts, economic and security assistance to the Palestinian Authority and continuous negotiations on all core issues.... Israeli officials noticed that Obama's people didn't mention the Annapolis process and interpreted this as the burial of Bush and Condoleezza Rice's ideas.... The president said this interpretation was unacceptable and that the Annapolis declaration was alive and well.

IV. QObama: IQll Validate Annapolis

Diplomatic correspondent Maya Bengal and others wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (4/7): QYesterday U.S. President Barack Obama conveyed a sharp signal to Israel during his visit to Turkey.

It implied that no matter what statements come out from Israel, the U.S. will act to promote the solution of two states for two peoples.

The great question that diplomatic sources asked was whether Israel and the United States will enter a confrontational track given the gaps regarding the road leading to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman's pronouncements and the fact that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made no statement so far that he is committed to a two-state solution annoy the White House.

VI. QIsrael Is Liable to Pay

Visiting Professor of Political Science at Haifa University Avraham Ben-Zvi, an expert in U.S.-Israeli relations, wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (4/7): QThe central message that emerges from [President Barack Obama's] multiple statements [in Ankara] is that it is his aspiration to turn over a new leaf in relations between the United States and Islam and, by so doing, to replace the narrow strategic vantage point of the Bush administration with a broader and more conciliatory approach. This new approach is based on the President's desire to build a bridge of understanding as well as cultural, economic and political cooperation with the Muslim world on the basis of respect, empathy, and tolerance. Obama envisions Turkey as serving as that bridge. Among others, the fact that Turkey has direct lines of dialogue with Syria and the various Palestinian factions is of great significance to Obama. In his eagerness to enlist Ankara as a central mediator between the West and Islam, Obama is prepared to cross a number of red lines. Even though Obama did not deviate from the well-known American position in his speech before the Turkish parliament, one cannot fail to ask whether the explicit mention of the Annapolis understandings heralds the beginning of a negative approach to Israel. The coming weeks and months will prove whether Israel, the traditional ally, will be the one that is obliged to pay the cost of laying down these tracks to Ankara, Damascus, Ramallah and Gaza.

CUNNINGHAM